

# Rhodora

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IN MEMORIAM: ALVAH AUGUSTUS EATON

R. G. LEAVITT.

It is already known to many readers of this journal that Alvah A. Eaton died at his home in North Easton, September 29th, after long suffering endured with heroic courage. Mr. Eaton's publications had made his name widely known. With a considerable number of American students of plants, especially students of ferns and fern-allies, he had formed relations of friendly and professional intercourse. He had been very active as a collector in the region of his residence, in which he had brought to light many plants of interest, including some that were new to science. From his excursions to little explored districts of Florida he had brought back valuable collections of orchids, ferns, and woody plants. He possessed a remarkable talent for finding things of interest and importance, however well concealed from ordinary eyes they might be, which, combined with activity, willingness to penetrate dangerous parts, and persistence in the face of difficulty, made him a very useful contributor to the progress of botanical science. Such men as he was can ill be spared.

Beyond the memorial of appreciation due to everyone who has given his life in devotion to the work which has lain before him, those who were during several years his associates in common tasks wish to express their admiration for Mr. Eaton's many excellent qualities as a man. His sincerity was perfect; every call made upon him for effort was accepted with eager responsiveness; his courage to face any difficult situation, danger to life, or bodily anguish, was of the finest quality.

The writer first became acquainted with him some seven years ago through an inquiry after certain aquatic plants in which Mr. Eaton



was expert. An invitation to the writer to visit Seabrook, N. H., followed. Upon the ensuing excursion to the Powow River and two subsequent trips along the Merrimac, Mr. Eaton's remarkable knowledge of habitats became clear. His transference to North Easton seemed not to disturb his accurate feeling for localities in which plants should be found, an instinct born of long and close familiarity with nature, and amounting oftentimes — so to the onlooker it seemed — to clairvoyant power. This apparent prescience and very remarkable vision distinguished Mr. Eaton among collectors of plants. His eye exhausted the details of the field at once, and picked out the smallest objects of search at distances which baffle any but the strongest sight. Walking rapidly along the roadside he would suddenly retrace his steps a little and out of the grass bring forth some small growth altogether beneath the range of the ordinary trained observer. This keenness was in part a gift, as regards optical perfection, partly the result of self-training in concentration and alertness of mind.

For, finally, this is to be said in honor of Mr. Eaton as a man of science, that he achieved what he achieved by his own efforts, unaided, and often against the force of circumstances. With only a high school education — received at Newburyport and accomplished in half the time usually required — he familiarized himself with much in the results of modern science, mastered French, German, and Latin sufficiently for his needs in taxonomy, mastered the local flora thoroughly and the fauna extensively, and above all won a position of authority in the study of two or three groups of particularly difficult plants. Most of this was done while he was supporting himself by work on a farm. Few men would have overcome the influence of poor health, lack of means, and varied discouragements as he did.

He left two unpublished papers of considerable length, one a study in the family *Orchidaceae*, already announced; the other his most important contribution to science, a monograph of North American *Isoëtes*, the result of many years of study, revised not long before his final illness.

His friends will be glad to know that in the closing weeks of his life, after it had become certain that he could not live, not only did he show a calmness and fearlessness, the fruition of a sincerely good life, but he was able — such was the strength of his nature — to feel in spite of pain much of peaceful enjoyment of his home and of the outdoors world. He said that the view from his tent door out across the mead-



ows to the trees beyond was as beautiful to him as anything on earth could be; and in a letter written shortly before death he said that he had been moved into the front room of his house — “the pleasantest room in the world.” During the entire last period, after the surgeon’s knife had, vainly, done its work and his bodily strength had gone, the real nature of the man shone out, noble and ennobling.

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## BOTANICAL WRITINGS OF THE LATE ALVAH AUGUSTUS EATON.

M. A. DAY.

[Feeling that a list of Mr. Eaton’s botanical writings would be both a respectful tribute to his memory and an aid to students of American botany, Miss Day, librarian of the Gray Herbarium, has at our request kindly prepared the following bibliography to accompany Dr. Leavitt’s sketch. It is due to Miss Day to state that the compilation was necessarily hurried, but it is believed that it includes all Mr. Eaton’s more important published contributions to botany and most if not all his minor notes. It is possible that some of the latter have appeared in local journals and have escaped mention. As Dr. Leavitt’s notice has taken the form of an appreciation of Mr. Eaton’s character and work, rather than an account of his life, it seems desirable to record here the following biographical data:—Alvah Augustus Eaton was born November 20, 1865, at Seabrook, New Hampshire. In 1898, he was elected Secretary of the Linnaean Fern Chapter, and in the following year chosen president of the same society. December 5, 1902, he was made a non-resident member of the New England Botanical Club. In September, 1904, he married Constance E. Wilkins. For about six years at the close of his life Mr. Eaton was officially connected with the Ames Botanical Laboratory at North Easton, Massachusetts, where he was engaged chiefly in monographic, bibliographic, determinative, and field work of a taxonomic nature. He is survived by his widow and only child, Fred W. Eaton.—Ed.]